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ABSTRACT

Program development in gifted and talented education is the focus of the digest. Elements of a successful program, including statements of support for differential education, staff orientation, and multiple appropriate screening and identification procedures are listed. Beginning steps for planning committees are noted. Identification approaches may include standardized achievement and intelligence tests, judgments of student products, and nominations by school officials, parents, or self. Staff considerations involve knowledge, training, and demonstrated competencies. Seven program formats are commonly employed: (1) regular classroom with cluster, (2) regular classroom with pullout, (3) special class, (4) special schools, (5) mentors, (6) acceleration, and (7) enrichment. Curriculum determination should be based on such factors as skill development for functioning beyond the classroom, reflection of students' interests, and emphasis on conceptual themes rather than the acquisition of additional facts. A brief list of resources concludes the document. (CL)

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1985
DIGEST

DEVELOPING PROGRAMS FOR THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

One of the first suggestions for developing a gifted and talented program is to form a planning committee made up of teachers, school administrators, parents, community representatives, and gifted students. The committee should examine the needs and interests of the students, the resources and interests of the school and community, and other program models. The program developed should be flexible and suited to the particular constellation of community needs and resources.

What Are the Elements of a Successful Program?

Experts (Renzulli, 1975) in the field of gifted education agree that the following elements are basic to a successful program (Renzulli, 1975):

- Statements of philosophy or purpose and objectives that support differentiated education for the gifted
- Orientation for all staff members designed to promote a knowledgeable and cooperative attitude
- Delineation of administrative responsibility
- Multiple appropriate screening and identification procedures
- Selection and training of teachers
- Systematic and comprehensive curriculum that evokes and develops superior behavioral potentialities in academic and artistic areas
- Evaluation plan

How Do You Begin?

The planning committee should begin with two definitions: 1) Who are the gifted and talented? and 2) What is a differentiated program? In 1981 Congress accepted this definition of gifted and talented children in P.L. 97-35 (Sec. 582):

> Gifted and talented children are those "who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership capacity, or specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities."

The planning committee should conduct an assessment of the students in the community to determine which of these areas would best match the students' needs and interests. Remember that "needs" for gifted and talented children is a term that describes potential, not deficiency, and the program the committee designs must be sufficiently flexible to allow students to develop their potential as fully as possible in as many areas as possible.

A differentiated program is one that develops higher cognitive concepts and processes and employs curricular content and instructional strategies matched to the learning styles and capabilites of the gifted learner. A sequential, systematic presentation of particular bodies of knowledge is common to the regular as well as the gifted curriculum. The program for the gifted must provide more opportunities for students to explore a discipline along their own lines of interest and ability. The students must experience real problems and find real solutions. The gifted program also provides an environment that values and enhances intelligence, talent, affective growth, and intuitive ability (Clark, 1983).

How Should a Target Group of Students Be Identified?

Multiple criteria including standardized and subjective assessments should be used. A weighted identification instrument could be developed that includes several of the following elements and is appropriately designed for intellectually, academically, or artistically gifted:

- Standardized achievement and intelligence tests (individual administration is preferred) with scores falling in the upper second and third percentiles of national or local norms.
- Student products judged in shows, portfolios, auditions.
- Nomination to the program by a teacher, school psychologist, specialist in gifted education, other school official, parent, or by the student himself or herself.

What Kind of Staff Should be Employed?

Teachers and administrators in the gifted program should be selected and trained carefully. They should have a demonstrated depth of knowledge of their specialized subject area as well as broad understanding of the interdisciplinary relationships between their specialization and other fields of study. Staff members should also have demonstrated competency in the development and implementation of individualized curriculum, innovative techniques, and use of critical and higher levels of thinking. Personal characteristics such as self-confidence, security, understanding, stamina, and a desire to work with bright students also enhance the likelihood of a teacher's success as a facilitator in the education of gifted and talented students.

It is important to designate a full-time coordinator who will have the final responsibility for the design and implementation of the gifted program. This person should have the same qualifications as the teachers in the program, but should possess an understanding of the school system that will enhance the success of the program. Small districts can combine their resources for the support of a joint coordinator.

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What Program Formats Are Commonly Employed?

There are several formats that can be used alone or in combination with other formats to provide a means by which gifted learners can develop their potential (Clark, 1983).

- *Regular Classroom with Cluster*. The teacher individualizes the regular curriculum to enable gifted learners to advance more rapidly or to explore selected aspects of their studies in greater depth. Learning centers, team and small group learning, and ungraded work with students from other grade levels can be part of this format.
- *Regular Classroom with Pullout*. Gifted students from several regular classrooms work with peers at their own level of ability and in areas of their interests during part of the school week.
- *Special Class*. A teacher with special training in a particular subject area facilitates students' learning.
- *Special Schools*. These schools can be summer or year-long residential programs.
- *Mentors*. In a mentorship program, a person with a particular interest studies with a person who has expertise in that area. Mentorships provide one-to-one social and professional partnerships that can be mutually beneficial.
- *Acceleration*. Research shows that acceleration can benefit the gifted individual by tailoring an educational program to allow fast progress through required topics, saving more time for in-depth study of topics that appeal to the students' interests.
- *Enrichment*. The regular curriculum can be enriched by adding disciplines that are not normally studied in the elementary or secondary program.

How Is the Curriculum Determined?

The curriculum for your gifted and talented program will be unique for your students, school, and community. Nevertheless, programs for the gifted should be based on some shared elements. First, the program should develop skills beyond those developed in the regular classroom. Secondly, content used to develop those skills should reflect the students' interests, and should be studied using the techniques and contexts appropriate to the field, that is, secondary school students undertaking a cross-cultural study of human decision making should use appropriate ethnographic methods of research to solve real problems. Conceptual themes should be emphasized rather than the acquisition of additional facts. Finally, students should have multiple options to explore in any given area of study.

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